

A PRACTICAL ISLAMIC PARENTING GUIDE

Muslim Teens

Today's Worry, Tomorrow's Hope

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Contents

Acknowledgments	v
Foreword	vii
Preface	viii
Introduction	ix
1. Know Your Teen and his Environment	1
2. North American Teenage Culture	13
3. Road Map	37
4. A Strong Confident Personality for Your Teen – Why and How to Reach it	51
5. From Knowledge to Conviction	65
6. Basic Concepts – How to Instill Them in Your Teen	105
7. Case Studies	149
8. Anatomy of Case Studies	163
9. Tools You Need and Ideas You Can Use	193
10. Positive Teen Experiences	221
References	257

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1. Know Your Teen

To be able to deal with any subject we have to understand the subject under discussion and learn everything we can about it. Islam encourages knowledge in everything to the extent that the first verse revealed in *Qur'an* talks about the most important tool of acquiring knowledge, which is reading:

اقْرَأْ بِاسْمِ رَبِّكَ الَّذِي خَلَقَ

"Read in the name of your Lord and Cherisher, Who created." (Q 96, V1)

As such, it is essential for every parent to understand the nature of teenage years as well as the physiological and psychological change teens go through during their development in these years. This knowledge will help parents to see things in the right perspective and understand how to handle various situations and conflicts that could arise in their dealings with their teens. The environment they grow in also affects teens. The culture of their peers also constitutes a certain level of pressure and often impacts the way they behave. These are important factors that parents have to clearly understand and be fully aware of to ensure that they deal with their teens properly in this society. As such, the first two chapters of the book will try to provide basic information on these topics. We will start the journey into the teens' personality with a look at the profile of an adolescent. Then we will continue to discuss the various stages of adolescence and the changes associated with each stage at the physical, psychological, social and intellectual levels in this opening chapter. The predominant teen culture in North America is then described in chapter two.

Profile of an Adolescent

In her valuable book, *Safeguarding your teens from the DRAGONS of life*, Bettie B. Youngs defines the adolescent as a person who...

- Is leaving behind the stage of childhood and working through the stages of adolescence.
- When scared or frightened, slips back into the security of the previous stage.
- Is undergoing rapid and intense of physiological and psychological changes.
- Wants to be independent, but does not have the backlog of personal experience to function independently in the society to which he belongs.
- Needs to express personal needs and have these needs taken seriously.
- Has not yet formed a cohesive value system that would support her in what to "live for," so this tremendously important anchor of security is not yet within reach.
- Is locked into financial and emotional dependence on the family.
- Is trying to make decisions of lasting importance --- career exploration, life values, relationships.
- Vividly notices when there is a discrepancy between the rules and values espoused by adults and adult behavior.
- Has limited understanding as to what highs and lows of emotions mean.
- Has limited understanding as how to cope successfully with the ups and downs of mood swings.
- Has strong need for adult mentoring and guidance.
- Is constructing a sense of selfhood.
- Feels lonely and alone when parents are physically and emotionally absent.
- Needs parent to show love, acceptance and attention.
- Needs guidance and direction.
- Learns mostly by exploration and trial and error.
- Needs skills to cope with stress and crises at hand.
- Needs adults to model healthy adult behavior.
- In the absence of effective adaptive coping skills becomes debilitated by the ravages of stress.

- When the family unit fails to provide an environment that is nurturing and supportive, turns to peers for the fulfillment of these needs.
- Is a high risk for incidence of poor health, alcohol and drug abuse, sexual abuse, family violence, sexual promiscuity, alienation and suicidal tendencies.
- Is by law a minor.

Stages of Adolescent

Most psychologists divide adolescence into three stages. These are: the early stage from 12-15 years old, the middle stage from 15-18 years old, and the later stage from 18-20 years old.

In the early stage teens are concerned about their body image and it is not strange to hear them making comments indicating that they hate themselves. In this stage peer pressure may be the most important aspect in the teen's life. They like to go around in groups and don't like to be alone. They like very much to conform to their peers, feel accepted and not get left out. Sometimes they are very impulsive and don't use common sense. The expert's advice to parents in this stage is to protect and discipline, be calm, and never enter into power struggle or confrontation with your teen.

In the middle stage, teens can move from one extreme to another. They want to feel more independent and often put too much emphasis on themselves. Also, at this stage, they are not good at managing their time. Parenting in this stage should stress on preparing teens to take responsibilities and providing focus for their teens to organize their lives.

As for the later stage, adolescents become more flexible and reasonable. They become better with their siblings, and peer pressure is not a big factor in their behavior anymore. They also become better planners and get more organized. In this stage, teens start challenging any inconsistency in parenting style. Now, they are in an equal relationship with parents. As such parents, should act as consultants who affirm and validate the choices of their teens and benefit them with their experiences.

The above three stages closely align with the inherited saying that one should play with his child for the first seven years and discipline him for the second seven years, then befriend him for the third seven years.

Changes and developments during Adolescent

During the adolescent years, many developmental changes take place at

various levels covering a range of aspects of the teen's life. These changes and developments manifest themselves at the intellectual level, physical, social, moral and ethical levels.

For the early adolescent stage, at the intellectual level, teens learn best under two conditions: (1) when the activity is experiential (active/doing) rather than passive (listening or reading); and (2) when they can interact with same-sex peers during the learning experience. At the later part of the early adolescent stage, the 14-and 15-year-old child is a curious learner, but considers academic goals secondary to personal social concerns. They also show strong willingness to learn things they consider to be useful, that is, related to real-life problems.

At the physical level, teens at this stage gain more weight, height, heart size, lung capacity and muscular strength. This stage of puberty produces some of the most dramatic sexual changes in teen's life: the growth of pubic hair, development of breasts, etc. At this stage girls are more likely to focus on the physical changes that accompany sexual maturation; while boys are more likely to feel anxious about receding chins, cowlicks, dimples and changes in tone of voice. Teens at this stage also experience fluctuations in basal metabolism that can cause extreme restlessness and listlessness. In the later part of this stage, internal and external physical maturation occurs at an amazing rate. The key hormones are working to move this child from preadolescence to full scale puberty. It is a time of enormous physical development in height, weight, lung capacity, heart size and muscular strength. For the teens, coping with the growing pains is traumatic and they are often tired and hungry.

The child's bone growth is still exceeding muscle development, resulting in poor coordination and awkwardness (especially for boys).

The 14-and 15-year old child desires to experience sex, but is largely unable to grasp the meaning of intimacy. Hormones moving the body toward sexual maturity are in motion, causing the child to feel sexual as well.

At the psychological level, moods will fluctuate frequently because of the acceleration of hormones in the body related to sexual development. Inconsistent mood swings, tantrums, and crying occur spontaneously and often for the most trivial reasons. The teens move quickly between feeling jovial and being "down in the dumps." At this stage they

are often introspective, easily offended and sensitive to criticism. At the later part of this stage, they are even more easily offended and very sensitive to criticism of personal shortcomings. They also exaggerate small occurrences and believe that their personal problems, experiences and feelings are very unique, as if nobody else has ever experienced them. Also at this stage, the child attempts to search actively for his identity. During his serious search for a stable sense of self, "Who am I?", he turns to others for a sense of self and is vulnerable to their comments. It is important at this stage that adults should show sensitivity towards him; especially parents and teachers.

At the social level, a teen depends on positive relationships with the same sex, and experience grave anxiety and disorientation when peer group ties are broken. She is easily confused and frightened by settings that are large and impersonal, such as a new school. She is easily provoked. Humour, tears, aggression and shyness can all be experienced in matter of moments. She needs frequent affirmations from parents and peers about intrinsic worth.

Boys pair up with boys and girls also cling together in search of reinforcement of their own role.

At the later part of this stage, the 14-and 15-year-old child experiences traumatic conflicts due to conflicting loyalties to peer groups and family. This child may be rebellious toward parents but is still strongly dependent on parental values. He wants to make his own choices. The child also refers to peers as sources for standards and models of behaviour. Media heroes and heroines are important in shaping both behaviour and fashion.

In addition to being fiercely loyal to peer group values, a 14-15 year-old child is also sometimes cruel or insensitive to those outside the peer group.

For the Middle adolescent stage, at the intellectual level, personal-social concerns dominate the thoughts of an adolescent. Learning about the world takes priority over school. At this stage, learning is best motivated when it is considered to be useful. He prefers active over passive learning experiences; and favors interaction with peers during learning activities. He is generally considered intellectually at risk because decisions have the potential to affect major academic values with long consequences; yet it seems so difficult to get his attention or